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## Living Beyond the Comfort Zone

I sat in a plane thousands of miles above ground, looking down at the city that would forever change my life. The two weeks I spent in Debre Zeyit, Ethiopia, held some of the scariest, most uncomfortable times and yet the most rewarding. I believe that when pushed out of my comfort zone I learn the most about who I am.

In the United States, I live the dream. Never once had I thought twice about sleeping in a warm bed. I wake up every morning to an abundant supply of my favorite foods. A loving mother and father are always there for me and pay for anything I could ever need. The faucet flows with soothing water whenever I desire and can be left on for as long as I want. Most importantly, in any moment of discomfort, I could step out of a situation that I didn't want to be in.

My friend Bre and I planned a mission trip to Ethiopia for nearly a year. The planning process was full of financial struggles and self-doubt. We arrived to the airport on a warm July evening. As we made our way through the winding lines of the customs process, the workers asked us several questions. They spoke in broken English: "What are your plans here in Ethiopia? Where are you staying? How long will you be here? Who did you come with?" They had a camera on us the entire time recording every word we said. Once we were given a stamp of approval, we made our way out into the lobby. To my surprise, hundreds of people were standing with flowers for their loved ones. Two of those people, our drivers, flagged us down. I realized that our light skin color made us easy to distinguish from the rest of the crowd. When we stepped outside, the distinct smell of Ethiopian smog filled my nose. It smelled like nothing I had smelled before and I thought I would never get used to it. The air was a hazy gray. It felt thick as I

breathed it in. High sharp mountains surrounded us, yet I could only see the peaks as the rest was masked by pollution. As we drove through the ancient dirt roads, we clutched each other's hands in the back seat of a velvet lined, tassel decorated, ten passenger van. I could feel a lump in my throat begin to form with the anxiety of what was to come. I prayed that I had made the right choice and for God to keep us safe.

When we arrived to the house where we would be staying, I was disturbed by how dirty and cold the house was. The kitchen was the size of my bathroom at home and dishes were piled high. There were holes in the walls and dust covered the tile floors. Our bunk beds had inch-thick mattresses. We would later discover they were filled with bed bugs. As I laid in bed, unable to sleep because of the seven hour time change, I couldn't help but miss my comfortable living at home. The sounds of dogs barking and people yelling in the streets only added to my discomfort. That night, my trust in God was tested like never before. I knew in my heart that He was calling me to this trip. In my moments of doubt, it was crucial to believe that He would protect Bre and me.

The next day, we were given a small tour of the city, and we quickly realized we were staying in one of the few houses in the entire city that wasn't a single room, mud and straw shack. For the rest of the trip, our house took on a different look. It was a mansion. The cold tile floors, warm running water, and beds to ourselves were luxuries that weren't going to be taken for granted.

The days went by much too quickly; before we knew it, a week had passed. We were beginning to love the country, the people, and even some of the smells. We met a family with whom we immediately fell in love. Their grandmother took care of six grandkids in a home no

larger than my bedroom. We decided to bring one of her granddaughters, Maza, to our home for a girls' sleepover. The plan was to simply paint our nails, eat dinner, and have a relaxing evening with her. That night, Maza told me several times she wanted to take a shower. At that moment, I didn't realize how much she had been looking forward to the shower. I also didn't know how her shower could impact me in such a profound way. As I showed her how to use our shower, she began to take her clothes off. At first I didn't know what to do, but at that point I didn't want to leave her alone. She stepped in the shower and I began rinsing her off. The water flowing from her skin was drenched in mud. Her face on the other hand, held the most beautiful expression I have ever seen. She was completely relaxed and serene. It became very clear that this eleven year old girl was experiencing her very first shower. While she was drying off, I stepped into the kitchen and began to cry. The face of this beautiful child made me realize what I had been taking for granted. Something so simple and mundane as a shower had proven to be, for many in the world, a gift to be treasured.

In Ethiopia, there were uncomfortable situations that were simply unescapable. I could go home and return to my usual comforts. For the people of this third world country, escape isn't an option. There are many times now that when asked to do something that won't be pleasant, I take it as an opportunity rather than a chore. Rather than filling discomfort with more material possessions, I take it as a well needed life lesson. Being pushed beyond our self-known limits is a chance for growth and self discovery. I believe that at any given chance we should seek to go beyond the comfort zone.